

# Therapeutic Massage Does More Harm Than Good

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Simon Edwards

Research Acceleration Initiative

## Introduction

Building upon my research into pain signalling from nerve fibers and the effect that pulling on or tearing nerve fibers has on the qualities of signals sent, I have taken a look at the somewhat more nuisance issue of chronic muscle spasms associated with back pain to investigate the likely mechanisms driving the condition.

## Abstract

Although only tertiarily related, muscle fibers share in common with nerve fibers that they can be "ripped" and that this tearing has an important purpose for both systems. In the case of nerves, the ripping allows pain signals to be sent and is followed by a healing process. Muscle fibers have a similar process. Repeatedly tearing muscle fibers causes them to come back in greater volume and at higher density in contrast with nerve fibers, which do not grow back without the addition of stem cells and lose some capacity to convey pain each time damage is done.

While tearing muscles tends to lead ultimately to the strengthening of those muscles, what of other types of damage? Therapeutic massage, when performed for an extended period of time, I submit, actually results in an unhealthy type of damage to muscle in the form of mild bruising.

"Bruise type" damage to muscle causes fluid pressure to build around cells, disrupting the process of muscle repair. Regardless of exercise level, therapeutic massage may not be so therapeutic after all for those suffering from chronic back spasms since this bruising is likely causing muscle atrophy, a common cause of cramping/spasm.

Interestingly, patients report relief after a massage but the return of symptoms 1-3 days after the fact. This keeps patients coming back for repeated and often expensive treatments.

Patients reporting chronic back pain ought to discontinue the practice of receiving massages and should instead perform exercises that build strength in the muscles of the back. Work-related actions like leaning over a counter, desk, or sink may be causing pain by inducing inflammation without actually "ripping" muscle. Performing these sorts of actions cause muscles to clench but actually weaken muscles more than they are strengthened. This loss of muscle tone is actually the root cause of the pain in most cases.

The practice of applying percussive force, kneading, or massaging the back for extended periods of time is likely the cause of the recurrence of back problems and not a real solution to it.

## **Conclusion**

While it may seem trivial, from a medical standpoint, permitting massage parlors to operate on the basis of treating a medical condition ought to come under FDA scrutiny in the same way an alcohol vendor would if they claimed that "hair of the dog" was a valid treatment for hangover. These parlors have been associated with human trafficking for decades and authorities claim that they have no way to tell the difference between legitimate and illegitimate massage businesses. From a medical standpoint, there are no legitimate massage businesses and there is no reason why any massage-based business should be allowed. Causing muscle bruising leads to atrophy and atrophy leads to spasm. Therapeutic massage is a scam, it's bad for you and it is associated with enough anti-social behavior that it is high time we eliminated it.